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CHURCH DENOUNCES INDONESIAN POLICY IN EAST TIMOR

As Mrs Thatcher prepares to visit Indonesia, and ten years after the Indonesian army invaded the small territory of East Timor, the Catholic Institute of International Relations is today publishing a new report on East Timor. CIIR criticises the passivity of Western governments and describes the growing concern of the Catholic church about human rights abuses, systematic corruption and the denial of basic freedoms in the territory. Conservative estimates put the number of Timorese deaths since 1975 at over 100,000 - around a sixth of the population.

The report argues that 'The deaths, disease, hunger and break-up of families in East Timor are not the result of a natural disaster but of Indonesian policies,' and that Western governments have a responsibility to press Indonesia on these issues. It describes the talks between Indonesia and Portugal which began in 1984 under the aegis of the UN Secretary General, Mr Perez de Cuellar, but points out that these have not included any representatives of the people of the territory, who are the most directly involved.

CIIR also records the concern which has been publicly expressed about the denial of basic rights to the people of East Timor by Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Bishops of Indonesia and the local Catholic Church in East Timor, led by Mgr Carlos Belo, who told European churches in December 1984: "We continue to hold and disseminate that the only solution to the East Timor conflict is a political and diplomatic one, and this solution should include, above all, the respect for the right of a people for self-determination...As long as this is not implemented, there will not be a peaceful solution for East Timor."

Mrs Thatcher is due to visit Jakarta during her tour of Southeast Asia between April 4 and 15. The British government has not accepted that the invasion in 1975 was justified, and has not recognised the incorporation of East Timor by Indonesia. Its view, reaffirmed by the Foreign Secretary in January 1985, is that 'the people of East Timor deserve the opportunity to determine their own future in accordance with their own political aspirations, unaffected by pressures of one kind or another'.

For further information

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